

Matthew 13; Luke 8; Luke 13 – Ep 195: CFM

The Parables

Richard Draper¹ explains:

The disciples of the Lord stood puzzled, perhaps even perplexed. For over a year they had followed their Master—hearing him, learning from him, drinking deep from the clear water of life that he offered. His doctrine was declared in unveiled plainness. This is not to say that he did not rely on the power of imagery. Indeed, his sayings were full of it: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out." (Matt. 5:13.) And again, "Every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes." (Luke 6:44.) These word pictures enhanced his message and gave it beauty.

But on this day his method of teaching changed. One after another, nothing but stories—parables—flowed from his mouth. What did they mean? Why did he suddenly change his approach? How were these parables to be understood? These and other questions puzzled the disciples.

From ancient times, symbolism has been one of the important means by which people have communicated ideas. Such figurative speech can range from single words to extended stories. Names have been given to these kinds of utterances. Among them are the following:

Metaphor

A metaphor is a word or group of words denoting one object or idea used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them. Some examples are: "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "Judah is a lion's whelp" (Gen. 49:9). In these cases, it is not implied that the person so described is actually the object used as identification; rather some characteristic of that object is attributed to the person, suggesting a likeness between the two. Metaphors cover a broad range of subjects and can include animals, plants, actions, ideas, topographical features, or inanimate objects. An example of the latter is "The prophet is a pillar."

Simile

A simile is the same as a metaphor, but with the use of such words as "like" or "as." Thus, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field" (Matt. 13:44), or "the prophet stands like a pillar at the head of the Church."

Allegory

An allegory is a metaphor in story form. There is usually a plot (in most cases quite simple), and the event is often metaphorical, as are the characters also. Generally speaking, Jesus' parables in the New Testament fall into this category.

Hyperbole

¹ Robert Millet and Kent Jackson (editors), [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels](#), Deseret Book, 2004, chapter 17 The Parables of Jesus, by Richard Draper.

Hyperbole is the use of extreme exaggeration to emphasize a point. In the scriptures, hyperbole is used not to mislead but to emphasize. A good New Testament example is in Jesus' mention of the mustard tree, which grows from the smallest of seeds into the greatest of trees. (Matt. 13:32.) This is not technically accurate, but the exaggeration emphasizes the lesson that he taught.

Parable

The word parable (Greek *parabole*) stems from the ancient Greek word *ballo* (to throw or set) with the prefix *para* (alongside or near). Though most of the New Testament parables are allegories, since most are metaphorical stories, the Gospels use the word parable to designate all types of figurative language, including simile and metaphor.

The Appeal of Parables

Because of its symbolic nature, the real point of any kind of parable can remain hidden from the hearer. Even so, there is a twofold advantage to teaching by this method. First, it makes the assimilation of truth easier. As one old Jewish proverb states: "Truth embodied in a tale shall enter in at lowly doors," meaning that even the most simple person can understand truth given by this means.² Second, truth taught in this way is more likely to be remembered, especially when hearers make their own deductions about its significance. In this way the hearers, in effect, teach themselves. The reason the Lord chose this form of teaching is not expressly stated in the scriptures but its use was deliberate. To Ezekiel he commanded, "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel." (Ezek. 17:2.) The parable was the riddle. Only the wise could deduce or the prophet supply the answer.³

That the message in a parable was hidden suggests a reason for its use. The dissonance caused by curiosity led the people either to the Lord or to his prophet. This allowed a second revelation to be given for the purpose of satisfying their curiosity,⁴ and placed the people in a position of double responsibility: first, they had asked for the revelation, and second, the revelation was repeated in plainness such that they could not misunderstand. In this way the Lord stood justified, whether or not the people obeyed. In addition, to those who were spiritually prepared, the parable brought understanding that could lead to life and salvation. In this light, Elder McConkie wrote:

Parables are a call to investigate the truth; to learn more; to inquire into the spiritual realities, which, through them, are but dimly viewed. **Parables start truth seekers out in the direction of further light and knowledge and understanding;** they invite men to ponder such truths as they are able to bear in the hope of learning more. Parables are a call to come unto Christ, to believe his doctrines, to live his laws, and to be saved in his kingdom. They teach arithmetic to those who have the capacity to learn calculus in due course. They are the mild milk of the word that prepares our spiritual digestive processes to feast upon the doctrinal meat of the kingdom.⁵

Jesus drew from the culture of his audience

² J. D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*, Eerdmans, 1962, p. 932.

³ Ezekiel was commanded to deliver some of his prophecies in the form of parables. For examples, see Ezek. 17:2-10; 24:3-8.

⁴ This process can be seen in Ezekiel as the people came to the prophet to inquire as to the meaning of his sayings and doings. For example, see Ezek. 24:19.

⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. Deseret Book, 1979-81, 2:245.

In some ways, Jesus' parables resembles those of the Pharisaic rabbis, who wrote in the centuries following the time of Christ but whose teachings may have their roots in Jesus' day. Both the rabbis and Jesus used parables to clarify and illustrate some of the main themes of their religious and ethical teachings... Both took their parables from the same relationships and customs, and these are reflected in their works. B. T. D. Smith notes the following about the use of parables by the rabbis and the Savior:

In Talmud and Midrash we find parables of sowing and harvesting, sheep-farming and house-building, of stewards and farmlands, landlords and tenants, as well as many others drawn from a different environment and unrepresented in the Gospels. There is a Rabbinic story of hid treasure, of a Pharisee and a Publican, of a prodigal son, of a feast meant for others but given to the poor, of guests rejected because unsuitably dressed, of laborers who grumble at the wage paid to others... behind both lies a common background of popular tales and illustrations...⁶

The Power of Parables to Conceal

In speaking in parables, the Savior followed his own instructions to the Twelve. They were told to preach the gospel and teach repentance. The deeper mysteries, however, they were to keep within themselves: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." (Matt. 7:6.) The Lord knew that "such unbelieving and rebellious people would first reject the message, and then use the very truths they had heard to rend and destroy and wreak havoc among those whose faith was weak."⁷

Through parables, the Lord protected sacred truths from being used to thwart his work. But there was another reason why he used them. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: "Had Jesus taught all of his doctrine in plainness, such would have added to the condemnation of his hearers (D&C 82:2-4). ***His use of parables to hide the full and deep import of portions of his message was an act of mercy on his part.***"⁸ He observed: "Parables are for nonmembers of the Church, for those outside the kingdom, or, at best, ... for those who are weak in the faith; who are not prepared to receive the truth involved in plain words; from whom the full truth must, as yet, remain hidden."⁹ At the same time, Jesus used parables to enlighten those who were faithful.

The Power of Parables to Reveal

Elder McConkie continued:

With it all, parables are majestic teaching devices, and they do reveal truth, and they do add light and understanding to those who already have the gift of understanding, as well as to those who are sincerely seeking truth...

Parables, planted in the minds of truth seekers, help them remember the issues involved until such time as the full and plain knowledge parts the parabolic veil and stands revealed for all to see. And parables

⁶ B. T. D. Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1937, p. 70.

⁷ McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* 2:238.

⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. Bookcraft, 1966-73, 1:284, emphasis added.

⁹ *The Mortal Messiah* 2:239

form a reservoir of knowledge about which even the saints can ponder and inquire as they seek to perfect and expand their limited views of gospel themes.¹⁰

It was also because of the ability of parables to reveal things in a graphic way that the Lord was able to use them against his enemies. This idea is seen in his instructions to the Twelve: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark 4:11-12.) This explanation should not be taken to suggest that the Lord used parables to deny light to the unenlightened or to harden the unbeliever in his unbelief. It is true that many may have become hardened toward the Lord, but that was not his purpose. His statement is really not a clause of purpose but of consequence. As one scholar has explained:

The truth is that the parables of Jesus are unique. The parables of other teachers and moralists can to some extent be separated from the teachers themselves. But Jesus and His parables are inseparable. To fail to understand Him is to fail to understand His parables. Consequently, to those who remain unaware of who He really is, or ignorant of the nature of the gift that He came to bring mankind, the mysteries of the kingdom of God, however many parables they may hear about it, must remain mysteries.¹¹

It is important to remember that Jesus said that it was not those who had accepted him but those who were "without" for whom he spoke in parables. Acts and deeds, not simply instruction and doctrine, were parables to those who stood deliberately apart from the disciples. This suggests that it was the whole of his ministry—not just his parables or his unveiled teachings, or even his miracles, but the whole of his deeds—that could not be understood by those who refused to accept him for what he really was. To such, even his miracles remained (and still do remain) only stories and portents devoid of real meaning. As he said, quoting Isaiah, it was because "they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand," that all remained a mystery to them. (Matt. 13:13; see also Isa. 6:9-10; 2 Ne. 16:9-10.)¹²

This was the same indictment leveled by Isaiah against the corrupt Israelites of his day. It revealed that deliberate kind of spiritual blindness through which they brought upon themselves temporal and everlasting destruction. The beloved John quoted this very passage to explain why the Jewish leaders refused to accept the Savior, "though he had done so many miracles before them." (John 12:37, 39-40.) The Lord's parables, as well as his acts and other teachings, expressed his disturbing new thinking, as compared with Judaism. His entire ministry was a message both clear and succinct. Thus we find some of his more detailed parables directed not to his disciples but to his antagonists, and not to obscure his message but to force it. (For example, see Matt. 21:23-22:14.) **Those who refused to believe did so not because they did not understand, but because they understood very well.** Having spiritually blinded

¹⁰ *The Mortal Messiah*, 2:239-240.

¹¹ Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 934.

¹² Joseph Smith taught that the reason the Jews would not receive the Lord as the Messiah was that they "would not understand; and seeing, they did not perceive." The reason for their misunderstanding "was because they were not willing to see with their eyes, and hear with their ears; not because they could not, and were not privileged to see and hear, but because their hearts were full of iniquity and abominations." (*Teachings*, pp. 95-96.)

themselves, they could not see the Light and Life of the world, and they were thus left to walk the dark path of the second death.¹³

Luke 8.1-3: Certain women... Mary called Magdalene out of whom went seven devils

The idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute is a longstanding tradition in Western Christianity, but it is not supported by historical evidence. This idea appears to have originated in the 6th century and is based on a conflation of Mary Magdalene with other biblical figures, such as the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and a sinful woman mentioned in the Gospel of John. These biblical characters were often identified as the same person and portrayed as a repentant prostitute. Some have asserted that Pope Gregory sealed her fate as a prostitute in 1591.¹⁴

However, this tradition has been challenged in recent times by scholars who have pointed out that **there is no evidence in the Bible to support the claim that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. The Gospels describe her as a follower of Jesus who was present at his crucifixion and was the first person to witness his resurrection.**

In recent years, the traditional view of Mary Magdalene has been challenged, and some scholars have sought to rehabilitate her image and correct the historical inaccuracies that have been associated with her. Nevertheless, the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute continues to persist in popular culture.

In 1969, [Pope Paul VI](#) issued a statement in which he officially declared that Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute, and he called for a reevaluation of her role in the early Christian Church. This statement was part of the larger process of the Catholic Church's reforms during the Second Vatican Council, which aimed to reexamine and update its teachings in light of modern biblical scholarship.

Since then, the Catholic Church has continued to revise its views on Mary Magdalene, and she is now widely regarded as an important disciple of Jesus and a witness to his resurrection. However, the traditional view that she was a prostitute continues to persist in popular culture and is still held by some individuals and groups.¹⁵

Luke 8.2 (Greek) καὶ γυναῖκές τινες αἱ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμέναι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν Μαρία ἡ καλουμένη Μαγδαληνὴ ἀφ' ἧς δαιμόνια ἑπτὰ ἐξεληλύθει

¹³ Draper, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Mary has been misunderstood for centuries. According to one source, her "transformation to penitent prostitute was sealed on September 14, 1591, when Pope Gregory the Great gave a homily in Rome that pronounced that Mary Magdalene, Luke's unnamed sinner, and Mary of Bethany were, indeed, the same person." He stated:

"She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark," Gregory said in his 23rd homily. "And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? . . . It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts . . ." See: ["Who framed Mary Magdalene?" U.S. Catholic, March 29, 2016.](#)

¹⁵ I will add that I do cite the popular show The Chosen when referring to many of the stories in the Gospels. I do not subscribe to the ways that this show has portrayed Mary Magdalene, as I see her as a visionary, certainly not one who has had seven demons cast out of her. I do acknowledge that this is what Mark 16.9 states, however, I hold to the view that this was a later addition, that Mark 16.9-20 was later added by someone and does not reflect a true portrayal of Mary. The Greek reading of Luke 8.2 indicates that she has come out of seven δαιμόνια, and so I hold to this portrayal of Mary, as I have indicated in the podcast. I acknowledge that this can be confusing, but seeing all the angles in context, in my opinion, gives some credibility to my interpretation of Mary Magdalene.

And some women, which **were cured** from evil spirits and **weaknesses**, Mary she being called Magdalene from whom seven δαιμόνια **she has come out**.¹⁶ (my translation)

This is important. This verse is not talking about the demons coming out of Mary, rather, she is “coming out” or more literally, “has come out of 7 *daimones*.” This matters, and the Greek reads this way, regardless of how later translators may have read the verse. If “they had come out” of her, the pluperfect Greek form would have read as ἐξεληλύθεσάν.

The plural endings here are: εμεν, θετε, θεσαν. The singular endings are: θειν, θεις, θει(ν). So in this instance, the Greek holds that Mary has come out of seven *daimones*. Luke 8.2 gives us some flexibility here for the things Mandy is talking about regarding 7 levels of heaven in Enoch and in the extrabiblical tradition.

Who were the *daimones*?

In ancient Greek religion and mythology, *daimones* (δαιμόνια) were seen as intermediate beings between humans and gods. They were generally considered to be powerful and sometimes malevolent spirits that could influence human affairs.

The Greeks believed that *daimones* could bring good fortune or bad luck, and that they could be propitiated with offerings and sacrifices. Some *daimones* were associated with specific domains, such as death, dreams, or nature, and were sometimes thought to be the departed spirits of the dead.

Overall, the Greeks had a complex and diverse understanding of *daimones*, with different beliefs and interpretations among different city-states and regions. Despite their sometimes negative reputation, *daimones* were also seen as capable of bestowing blessings and were revered in certain cults and traditions.¹⁷ In ancient Greek mythology, *daimones* (δαιμόνια) were sometimes associated with the heavens. For example, the *daemons* of the stars were considered to be responsible for guiding the planets and stars in their celestial paths. In this sense, they could be seen as guardians of the heavens, overseeing the movements of celestial bodies and ensuring their smooth operation.

However, *daimones* were also associated with many other aspects of the natural and supernatural world, and their roles and functions were often complex and diverse. So, while they were sometimes considered guardians of the heavens, they also had many other responsibilities and powers in the Greek pantheon.

Mark 16.9

Ἀναστὰς δὲ **πρωῖ** πρώτη σαββάτου ἐφάνη πρῶτον Μαρίᾳ τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ **ἀφ’**
ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια

And he having risen **early** on the first of the Sabbath, he was seen first by Mary Magdalene, **from whom** he **had cast out/thrown out/sent out seven** δαιμόνια.

¹⁶ ἐξεληλύθει is the 3rd person singular pluperfect form of the verb ἐξέρχομαι – “to go out, come out.” This would literally be translated as “she has come out.” The form of the pluperfect tense in Greek is generally translated into English as the past perfect tense. The past perfect tense is used to describe an action that was completed before another action in the past. It is formed using the auxiliary verb “had” followed by the past participle of the main verb.

¹⁷ One author asserts, “The daimon itself is an entity with a rather convoluted history...” This is an understatement. For further reading, see: Hailey Fuller, [From Daimon to Demon: The Evolution of the Demon from Antiquity to Early Christianity](#), UNLV Thesis, May 2013.

δαίμονια is here in the **accusative** plural and neutral gender. So the δαίμονια here are being εκβαλλω'd essentially. I don't see Mary "coming out of seven daimons" in any way in Mark 16.9, no matter how you stretch out the Greek. So we can have seven gods, or seven deities, or seven evil spirits, being cast out, but I don't see *her* coming out of seven *daimones* here in this text. This brings up other issues, for "virtually all scholars" see Mark 16.9-20 as a later addition to Mark's gospel.¹⁸

Definition of *daimon*:

δαίμονια = of or belonging to a δαίμων.¹⁹ 1. A god, a goddess. 2. A deity or divine power. 3. One's daemon or genius, one's lot or fortune. 4. The souls of men of the golden age (Hesiod), any departed souls. 5. An evil spirit.

¹⁸ According to Julie Smith, they assert this for the **following reasons**: **1.** The two oldest Greek manuscripts omit the longer ending. Other ancient manuscripts that include it append a note indicating that the text is uncertain. **2.** It is difficult to imagine why a copyist would omit it; it is much easier to imagine a copyist adding it. **3.** Several early Christian writers appear to know copies of the Gospel of Mark that do not include 16.9-20. **4.** The style differs substantially from the rest of the Gospel. (These problems not only suggest that 16.9-20 was not original to Mark but also that it was not written afresh to end the text but rather was a preexisting text.) Stylistic infelicities include the following: A. The transition between 16.8 and 16.9 is awkward: the implied antecedent of "he" is Jesus, but 16.8 was about the women, not Jesus. B. The time reference is unnecessarily repeated in 16.9. Also, it is inconsistent to have Jesus rise very early in the morning when that was the time the women went to the tomb and found it empty. C. Mary Magdalene is introduced to the audience in 16.9 as if they were unfamiliar with her despite the fact that she was mentioned just a few verses before. The other Mary and Salome drop out of the text without explanation. D. Mark has no story of demons having been cast out of Mary Magdalene, making 16.9 difficult to understand. (As a sidenote, I [Mike Day] would add that if we analyze the Greek construction of Luke's narrative, then **there is no story of demons coming out of Mary anywhere in the Gospels**. This is a later construction added in by whoever added 16.9-20 to the end of Mark's account of Jesus). E. The fear of the women was underscored in 16.8, but it disappears without explanation in 16.9. F. In 16.10, the identity of the "them" is unexplained. Presumably it would be the disciples, but no antecedent is given. Further, their mourning is difficult to understand, when their last action was to abandon Jesus. G. Mark 16.12 refers to Jesus appearing in different forms but nowhere explains what these forms were. H. The summary nature of 16.9-20 would not have been consistent with an oral performance and therefore does not fit well with the rest of Mark's Gospel. It is very different from Mark's storytelling style: Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene, but no details whatsoever of the incident are given. I. Over a dozen words included in 16.9-20 are not found elsewhere in Mark. For example, the title "Lord Jesus" is not used elsewhere in Mark. J. The setting of 16.9-20 appears to be Jerusalem, but the young man at the tomb told the women that Jesus would meet them in Galilee. K. In 16.1-8, the women are given a task, but that task has disappeared from 16.9-20. L. There is no evidence of the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy that he will meet his disciples in Galilee (14.28). **5.** Substantive theological differences distinguish 16.9-20 from the rest of Mark's Gospel: A. The theology of belief and baptism distinguish 16.9-20 from the rest of Mark's Gospel. B. The idea of signs following believers is foreign to Mark. Nowhere else in the NT are believers promised immunity from threats such as poison and snakes. (In fact, Jesus' instructions to the Twelve in 6.8 to take a staff imply the need to fend off dangers.) The desire for signs is criticized explicitly in 8.11-13 and, implicitly, in 15.32. **6.** Many elements of 16.9-20 seem borrowed from other NT texts and do not relate to Mark's concerns, including the scene with the two disciples on the road (Luke 24.13-35), the reproach for unbelief (John 20.19, 26), the great commission (Matt. 28.19), salvation (John 3.18, 36), speaking in tongues (Acts 2.4, 10.46), and ascension (Luke 24.51). **7.** Matthew and Luke follow Mark quite closely until 16.8, and then their texts diverge substantially; this suggests that they had copies of Mark that ended at 16.8. **8.** The existence of other endings strongly suggest that 16.9-20 was not present originally. It implies that some found 16.8 to be inadequate and decided to add to the ending. For these reasons, 16.9-20 was almost certainly not originally part of the Gospel of Mark. Based on its theological concerns and when it is attested, it was probably written in the second century. See: Julie Smith, [The Gospel According to Mark, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary](#), BYU Studies, 2018, p. 871-873.

¹⁹ δαίμων Perh. from δαίω B, to divide or distribute destinies. From [Middle Liddell](#).

In ancient Greek mythology, there were many famous daimones (δαίμονια). Some of the most well-known *daimones* include Eros (Cupid) – the god of love, Pan – the god of the wild, Morpheus – the god of dreams, and so forth. These beings represented both positive and negative forces in the world of the Greeks, and they functioned to move the myths of their lives forward. I see this story of Mary coming out of these as a possible reference to her being a visionary, a mighty woman who has been to the seven heavens, in the same way as Isaiah as he is portrayed in [The Ascension of Isaiah](#).²⁰

Matt. 13.1-23; Mark 4.1-27; Luke 8.4-18: The Parable of the Sower

“The Prophet Joseph Smith provided an important guideline about pondering and reflecting upon the scriptures. He taught: ‘I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I enquire, **what was the question which drew out the answer, or caused Jesus to utter the parable?**’ (*History of the Church*, 5:261). Thus, striving to understand the question that preceded a particular revelation, parable, or episode can assist us in obtaining a deeper understanding of the scriptures.”²¹

Perhaps in this parable Jesus was answering the following question:

“Jesus, why do some people love you, while others do not understand you, and yet some even hate you?”

The Tree of Life vision is sometimes called “the Parable of the Paths.” Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, or the four kinds of soil (see Matthew 13:3–9; Mark 4:3–9; Luke 8:5–8), parallel exactly the four groups described in Lehi’s Dream.

1. The Way Side (Matt. 13.4).
2. Stony places (Matt. 13.5).
3. Among thorns (Matt. 13.7).
4. Good ground (Matt. 13.8).

Lehi’s dream contains some interesting parallels to Jesus’ parable.

Group 1 (1 Nephi 8:21-23) What characteristics define this group?

Group 2: (1 Nephi 8:24-28) What characteristics define this group?

Group 3: (1 Nephi 8:30,33) What characteristics define this group?

Group 4: (1 Nephi 8:31-33) What characteristics define this group?²²

We should be careful to not read any fatalism into this parable. Elder James E. Talmage discusses this parable:

Some Bible expositors have professed to find in this splendid parable evidence of decisive fatalism in the lives of individuals, so that those whose spiritual state is comparable to the hardened pathway or wayside ground, to the shallow soil on stony floor, or to the neglected, thorn-ridden tract, are hopelessly and irredeemably bad; while the souls who may be likened

²⁰ See also: [Early Christian Writings, The Ascension of Isaiah](#).

²¹ Elder David A. Bednar, [“Lessons in Pondering the Scriptures,” Ensign, Jan. 2009](#). See also: “Because We Have Them before Our Eyes,” *New Era*, Apr. 2006, 6.

²² Ted Gibbons, [The Vision of the Tree of Life, LDS Living, Jan. 4, 2012](#).

unto good soil are safe against deterioration and will be inevitably productive of good fruit. ***Let it not be forgotten that a parable is but a sketch, not a picture finished in detail***; and that the expressed or implied similitude in parabolic teaching cannot logically and consistently be carried beyond the limits of the illustrative story. In the parable we are considering, ***the Teacher depicted the varied grades of spiritual receptivity existing among men, and characterized with incisive brevity each of the specified grades***. He neither said nor intimated that the hard-baked soil of the wayside might not be plowed, harrowed, fertilized, and so be rendered productive; nor that the stony impediment to growth might not be broken up and removed, or an increase of good soil be made by actual addition; nor that the thorns could never be uprooted, and their former habitat be rendered fit to support good plants... A strong metaphor, a striking simile, or any other expressive figure of speech, is of service only when rationally applied; if carried beyond the bounds of reasonable intent, the best of such may become meaningless or even absurd.²³

Richard G. Scott taught:

"Satan has a powerful tool to use against good people. It is distraction. He would have good people fill life with "good things" so there is no room for the essential ones."²⁴

Matt. 13.24-40: Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

After Jesus concluded the parable, his disciples waited until they could be alone with him, then asked for an interpretation. Jesus' interpretation was plain and to the point: the sower was Christ himself; the field represented the world; the good and bad seed represented the good and bad people of the world; the enemy represented Satan; the reapers at harvest time are the angels of God; and the harvest is symbolic of the end of the world.²⁵

"We learn by this parable," Joseph Smith wrote, "not only the setting up of the Kingdom in the days of the Savior which is represented by the good seed, which produced fruit, but also the corruptions of the Church, which are represented by the tares which were sown by the enemy, which His disciples would fain have plucked up, or cleansed the Church of, if their views had been favored by the Savior. But He, knowing all things, says, Not so. As much as to say, your views are not correct, the Church is in its infancy, and if you take this rash step, you will destroy the wheat, or the Church, with the tares; therefore it is better to let them grow together until the harvest, or the end of the world, which means the destruction of the wicked, which is not yet fulfilled..."

"The harvest and the end of the world have an allusion directly to the human family in the last days... As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world; that is, as the servants of God go forth warning the nations, both priests and people, and as they harden their hearts and reject the light of truth, these first being delivered over to the buffetings of Satan, and the law and the testimony being closed up, as it was in the case of the Jews, they are left in darkness, and delivered over unto the day of burning; thus being bound up by their creeds, and their bands being made strong by their priests, [they] are prepared for the fulfilment of the saying of the Savior—'The Son

²³ James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), Deseret Book, 1986, p. 140, emphasis added.

²⁴ Richard G. Scott, "First Things First," *Ensign*, May 2001, 7.

²⁵ Donald Parry, [Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ](#), Deseret Book, 2010, "The Wheat and the Tares."

of Man shall send forth His angels, and gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' We understand that the work of gathering together of the wheat into barns, or garners, is to take place while the tares are being bound over, and [incident to] preparing for the day of burning; [and] that after the day of burnings, the righteous shall shine forth like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father."²⁶

Application

This parable has a number of immediate applications for Saints in the latter days. We have the privilege of participating both in the sowing and the harvesting. We can represent God and his angels in seeking out souls who will turn their hearts to Christ. And we can help to gather that good wheat into the kingdom.

At the same time, we need to make sure we are good seeds ourselves, that we are growing up as wheat and not as tares, that we are following Christ rather than the adversary.

We choose to be wheat by coming unto Christ with all our desire, by receiving the ordinances and covenants of the gospel, and by continuing in righteousness until the end.²⁷

Matt. 13.31-35; Mark 4.30-34: Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven

Jesus presents a contrast by using the words least and greatest.²⁸ A mustard seed was the least²⁹ or the smallest of all seeds used by farmers at the time of Jesus Christ, but the plant that grew from that seed would eventually become the "greatest among herbs." As a mature tree it would grow to a height of eight to ten feet. The comparison of God's kingdom to the smallest of seeds may have shocked Jesus' hearers, who were anticipating a kingdom large and powerful enough to prevail over all other kingdoms, including the Roman Empire, which dominated at the time the parable was uttered. Certainly the comparison of the kingdom to a mature cedar or a mighty oak would have been more appropriate. But the parable particularly applied to the kingdom of God that would be established in the last days and that would continue to grow through the Millennium. This kingdom is The Church of Jesus Christ. Even though the seed of that kingdom was initially planted in Jesus' day, it eventually went dormant and remained so for centuries, until it sprouted with the restoration of the gospel.

Joseph Smith taught this interpretation in an unmistakable manner when he said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a mustard seed. Behold, then is not this the Kingdom of Heaven that is raising its head in the last days in the majesty of its God, even the Church of the Latter-day Saints, like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty deep."³⁰

In the same sermon, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "Let us take the Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field, securing it by his faith, to spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it

²⁶ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 97-98, 101.

²⁷ Parry, *Understanding the Parables*.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Parry explains, "On another occasion Jesus used a mustard seed, due to its smallness, as a point of comparison (see Matthew 17:20). He told his listeners that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, or even a very small portion of faith, they would be able to accomplish great deeds."

³⁰ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 98-99.

branching forth, yea, even towering, with lofty branches, and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven, and God is sending down His powers, gifts and angels, to lodge in the branches thereof."³¹

Matt. 13.36-43: The Explanation of the Wheat and the Tares

The Sower is the Son of Man (Matt. 13.37).

The Field is the world (Matt. 13.38).

The good seed are the children of the kingdom (Matt. 13.38).

The tares are the children of the wicked one (Matt. 13.38).

The Devil is the enemy that sowed them and the reapers are the angels (Matt. 13.39).

Matt. 13.44-53: Parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven

A treasure in a field (Matt. 13.44)

The Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13.45-46)

"...as we travel in the missions, as President McKay has just done, down in the islands of the South Pacific, and down in Central America where I have just been, I interviewed some of the missionaries who are converts to the Church who have never been here in our midst, and when they tell us that they had nothing to live for until the gospel found them, and now they really have something to live for, and bear witness that the time that they have been in the Church is the happiest time of all their lives, it makes you feel grateful to God that the Church has grown to such proportions that it can begin to reach out into all these foreign fields and carry to them the message of eternal truth as the Lord has revealed it... ***I told those good people down in that land that if I had come to them from the States with enough money to give each of them a million dollars, it would not be worth one hundredth part as much to them as the message that I had to bring to them. That represents the importance of our message.*** It is what Jesus called the 'pearl of great price.' He said that when a merchant man seeking goodly pearls found the 'pearl of great price,' he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:45-46.) And when one has acquired it, it is a thing that brings joy and peace and happiness and satisfaction into one's soul, the like of which he cannot find in any other way in the world."³²

[The Hymn of the Pearl](#) is a story of a young prince who leaves his heavenly home, forgets his identity, and is reminded of who he truly is. He must obtain the pearl and find his way back to his heavenly parents. [The Hymn of the Pearl](#), which is part of a writing known as [The Acts of Thomas](#), an [apocryphal text](#) purported to have been written in the second or third century. This story is of great importance, as it is the message of the Cosmic Myth.³³

The Gospel Net (Matt. 13.47-51)

³¹ *Teachings*, p. 98.

³² Elder LeGrande Richards, *Conference Report*, April 1955, 121, emphasis added.

³³ See: [The Hymn of the Pearl](#). This is also entitled "The Cosmic Myth."

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven, or the Lord's Church, to a simple fishing net that, when cast into the sea, gathers all kinds of fish. Generally, the fishing nets of Jesus' day (see, for example, Matthew 4:18–21; Mark 1:16–19) were either dragged between two boats or between a boat located offshore and workers standing on the shore. The net had weights or sinkers on one side to pull it down into the water and floats on the other side to keep it on the water's surface while it was being dragged. Such a large net was designed to pull in a multitude of fish and, in doing so, would have collected both edible as well as trash fish. Some two dozen fish species inhabit the Sea of Galilee, and the fishermen were required to know the good from the bad so that once the fish were drawn to shore, the fishermen could sort them out, keeping the good and throwing out the bad... The Lord does not explicitly mention fishermen or the word fish in the parable, but both are understood to belong to it. The fishermen are those who cast the net into the sea and draw it into the shore, full of fish. The fish thus caught are of every kind, and the fishermen separate them, placing the good into containers and throwing the trash fish away... If the fishermen of the parable represent God's missionaries, then the fish symbolize people... Joseph Smith understood the plain meaning of the parable and likened it to missionary work and the gathering of modern-day Israel to Zion. Those who are of "seed of Joseph" are the fisherman or the missionaries.³⁴

The Joseph Smith Prophet wrote:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, which when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.' For the work of this pattern, behold the seed of Joseph, spreading forth the Gospel net upon the face of the earth, gathering of every kind, that the good may be saved in vessels prepared for that purpose, and the angels will take care of the bad. So shall it be at the end of the world—the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."³⁵

Luke 8.26-40; Matt. 8.28-34; Mark 5.1-20: Jesus Casts out Legion into the Gadarene Swine (see also Luke 9.37-43; Matt. 17.14-21; Mark 9.14-29, where a boy who has a demon is healed).

"I am Legion!" (Luke 8.32; Mark 5.9)

Brigham Young taught that unclean spirits are here on the earth and they desire to enter into mortal bodies:

"The Lord Almighty will not let anything endure that offers hospitality to the devil and his imps... they are trying all the time to get into our dwellings, because they have none of their own. Did you ever desire to take possession of another person's tabernacle, and leave your own? No rational person owning a tabernacle would wish to do so. The devils have no tabernacles, which is the reason of their wanting to possess human bodies. If any of you have suffered any of these houseless spirits to enter you, turn them out... Do you think the legion we read of, that entered the swine, in the days of Christ, had bodies of their own? No; they have no meeting houses but

³⁴ Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ*, "The Gospel Net."

³⁵ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 102.

in ball rooms, gaming houses, brothels, gin palaces, parlors, bed rooms, and other places which they frequent in the bodies of those they lead captive; otherwise they are wandering to and fro in the earth, seeking to possess tabernacles that other spirits, not of their order, already occupy. ***They are in our midst watching for an opportunity to enter where they may.*** What will be the doom of those who give way to them, and yield to them the possession of their tabernacles? ***They will wander to and fro, happiness will be hid from them,*** they will weep, and wail, and suffer, ***until their bodies return to their mother earth, and their spirits to judgment.***³⁶

The Adversary has no body of his own

Joseph Smith taught:

"The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The Devil has no body, and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of [a] man, and when cast out by the Savior, he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine's body to having none. All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not. ***The Devil has no power over us, only as we permit him;*** the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the Devil takes power."³⁷

Luke 9.37-43; Matt. 17.14-21; Mark 9.14-29: A Demonic Boy is Healed

It might be relevant that, like Moses, Jesus must deal with the failure of those he left in charge once he comes down from the mountain (Ex 24:14; 32:1-8, 21-25, 35), though Jesus has not been absent as long. In some cases of spirit possession noted by anthropologists, persons become violently out of control and risk injury to themselves, as here. Although some compare symptoms here with epilepsy, Matthew does not always associate that affliction with demons (Mt 4:24).³⁸

Why could we not cast him out? (Matt. 17.19) Because of your unbelief... If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you! (Matt. 17.20)

Luke 13.1-5: Jesus' Call to Repentance for the Citizens of Jerusalem

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye

³⁶ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:129. At another time President Young taught "There are millions and millions of spirits in these valleys, both good and evil. We are surrounded with more evil spirits than good ones, because more wicked than good men have died here; for instance, thousands and thousands of wicked Lamanites have laid their bodies in these valleys. The spirits of the just and unjust are here. The spirits that were cast out of heaven, which you know are recorded to have been one-third part, were thrust down to this earth, and have been here all the time, with Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, at their head." See: Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886], 4:133-34. Funeral sermon by Brigham Young on the death of President Jedediah M. Grant. December 4, 1856.

³⁷ Kent P. Jackson, compiler and editor, [*Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible*](#), Deseret Book, 1994, 85, emphasis added.

³⁸ Keener, p. 88.

that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13.1-5 KJV).

Historical Background

This is probably a fragmented account of something that Pontius Pilate did in his punishment of the Jews in Galilee. This account in Luke 13:1-2 is referring to the massacre of some Galileans by Pilate's soldiers while they were offering sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. The incident is mentioned by Jesus as an example to emphasize the point that suffering and death are not necessarily consequences of one's own sinfulness, but can also be a result of broader historical and political circumstances.

This event *may have been*³⁹ referred to by the historian Josephus:

"So he [Pilate] bid the Jews himself go away; but they boldly casting reproaches upon him, he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; who laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those that were tumultuous, and those that were not; nor did they spare them in the least: and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition."⁴⁰

How these people viewed punishment and sin

In popular piety (based on the Deuteronomic promises [see Deut. 28-30]), disaster is taken as a punishment for sin (Job 4:17; Ezek 18:26), and this conviction is reflected in John 9:2-3. as well as the healing stories of Luke (e.g., 5:20-24). Jesus does not dispute the equation but simply questions whether they were more egregious sinners than others.⁴¹

This may have been a set up by Jesus' detractors.

Bishop Moshe bar Kepha taught:

"Some of the Jews came to our Lord and deceptively reported it to him as some of the interpreters had said, waiting, so that if he answered that Pilate did well when he killed them, they could accuse him, saying: He stands against the Law since he (Jesus) justified the killing of those who slaughtered sacrifices to God. And if he answered them that they were wrongly killed, they will complain about him before Pilate that he is standing against the kingdom and the authority of the Romans. Therefore, our Lord answered them differently, and not as they wished and desired. At any rate, whether deceitfully or directly they said this to him, our Lord

³⁹ The two incidents related in 13:1-5 are unique to Luke. ***None of the accounts concerning Pilate's penchant for punishing Jews exactly matches this rendition, though they support the picture of him as an administrator who reached quickly for violent solutions*** (Josephus, Antiquities 18:85-89; Jewish War 2:169-177). The point of Luke's recital is less the history of Pilate's reign than of the need to repent. See: Luke Timothy Johnson, [Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke](#), The Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 211. Joel Green also notes that this account is not attested in the histories: "The scenario presented to Jesus is of Pilate's execution of Jewish pilgrims from Galilee, cut down while in the act of offering sacrifices. ***Otherwise unattested, the event thus reported is nonetheless consistent with what is more generally known of Pilate*** according to Jewish sources." See: Joel Green, [The Gospel of Luke](#), Eerdmans, 1997, p. 721 electronic version, emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 18, chap. 3, verse 2.

⁴¹ Luke Johnson, p. 211.

took up this matter and that what had happened at that time, I mean, the tower [built] in Siloam that fell immediately upon eighteen men and killed them. Concerning these two fearful matters, when he responded to them, he continued his speech for the benefit of the hearers, saying: Do not think that they were killed because they were greater sinners than those Galileans, and it was not that, because they were greater sinners than all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the tower fell upon them and killed them. But these are the proof of punishment the people will receive on the account of their guilt. And even you, if you do not change, returning from bad to good, and believe in me, the punishment of death will come upon you, just like them, and even worse.”⁴²

The Tower of Siloam

The “tower in Siloam” may have been on Jerusalem’s city wall above the pool of Siloam; some suggest that it may have been associated with Pilate’s construction of an improved water-supply system for the city. The feast may have been Passover, when nonpriests offered their animals.⁴³

Luke 13.6-9: The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

Mark 11.12-14 and Matt 21.18-19 each have a story about Jesus and a fig tree in direct narrative: Jesus finds a tree that does not bear fruit and curses it. Luke’s parable may derive from the same tradition, but he turns it in quite a different way. The fig tree and the vine are found together in Micah 4.4 and Joel 2.22 as signs of God’s blessings.⁴⁴

Luke 13.10-17: A Woman is healed on the Sabbath

You are loosed from your infirmity! (Luke 13.12)

Ancient medical writers used words like “loose” to describe the removal of curvature of the spine and related ailments. The term was also used of freeing people from a demon’s grip.⁴⁵

The ruler of the synagogue argues that Jesus should not heal on the sabbath (Luke 13.14).

The synagogue leader’s argument sounds logical: work is forbidden on the sabbath, but that still leaves six days a week for healings. The problem with the argument is that biblical sabbath laws did not restrict God’s activity, and the only physical work Jesus performs on this sick woman is to lay his hands on her (though some Pharisees considered this work). Even Pharisaic rules officially forbade only healing by a physician; they debated the propriety of prayer for the sick on the sabbath.⁴⁶

Luke 13.18-21: The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven

⁴² Abdul-Maasih Saadi, [Moshe Bar Kephah’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke](#), p. 200. Moshe Bar Kephah (813-903 AD) was a prolific writer of the ninth century and a celebrated bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the ninth century. His writings reflect various aspects of West Syriac theology and ecclesiology, and his literary legacy links the earlier Syriac exegetical tradition (beginning with Ephrem) with the Syriac ‘Renaissance’ of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

⁴³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 215.

⁴⁴ Johnson, p. 211.

⁴⁵ Keener, p 215.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Everyone regarded the mustard seed as very small; indeed, something smaller would be hard to see easily. It nevertheless yielded a shrub the size of a small tree (around the Sea of Galilee, it can reach a height of eight to ten feet, though rarely more than five, if interpreters have the correct plant in view), with room for small birds to perch in it (borrowing the language of Daniel 4:12, the splendor of a mortal ruler's kingdom). According to second century Palestinian teachers the mustard seed was not sown in gardens (cf. Mt 13:31); but outside Palestine (where Luke's hearers lived) it could be. Leaven, or yeast, would be mixed with flour throughout the dough. The point of both parables (13:18-21) is that the mighty kingdom everyone expects could issue from apparently obscure beginnings—like Jesus and the disciples.⁴⁷

Luke 13.22-30: Are there few that are saved? The “Two Ways”

The image of “the two ways” was common in Jewish (and other ancient) literature; some texts also stressed that the majority of people would follow the way to destruction (see, from the late first or early second century, 4 Ezra 7:3-16, 60-61; 8:1-3). Other Jewish groups besides Christians, like the Essenes, also believed that they were the only saved group. But many mainstream Jews apparently believed that nearly all Israel would be saved in the time to come (cf. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1).

Will few be saved?

Few as compared to the hosts of men in our present worldly society (Matt 7:13-14), but many when all who so obtain are counted together...The expansion of world population being what it is, we can suppose that the billions who live on earth during the Millennium-and who 'grow up without sin unto salvation' (DC 45:58)-shall far exceed in number the total hosts of men who have lived during the preceding six thousand years. Truly, in the aggregate, there are many who shall be saved!"⁴⁸

Alonzo Gaskill commented on this idea:

“We must remember – and we must firmly believe -- that the plan of salvation, the great plan of happiness, was designed to work. Indeed, it would not be called the eternal plan of salvation / happiness / redemption / mercy / deliverance / etc. if it did not work – particularly if its primary effect was the damnation⁴⁹ of the vast majority of God's offspring.

Yes, agency must be preserved. ***But to design a plan that is so difficult to succeed at that most would fail does not preserve agency. On the contrary, such would thwart both agency and the very thing the Plan was created to accomplish – namely, our exaltation. The thought that God would promote something that would ensure that the vast majority of His children would never again be able to dwell in His presence is incomprehensible.*** And the assumption that our mother in heaven would idly sit back

⁴⁷ Keener, p. 216.

⁴⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:475.

⁴⁹ From an LDS position, to be damned is to be stopped in one's progression (i.e., to be forever in a non-exalted state). ***It intuitively goes against everything we know about the nature of God to suggest that He would create and institute a plan that would, by design, damn most of His children.***

and allow such a guaranteed flop to eternally strip her of any interaction with her spirit offspring is equally unfathomable. Such could not – and did not – happen!⁵⁰

Luke 13.31-35: Jesus Laments over Jerusalem

“As a hen doth gather her brood under her wings...” (Luke 13.34)

Jewish tradition claimed that Jewish people were under God’s wings, and when a Jewish person converted a Gentile, he or she “brought the Gentile under the wings of God’s presence.” The Old Testament also portrays God as an eagle hovering over its offspring (Deut 32:11; cf. Ex 19:4) and protecting Israel under his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4), and similarly terrifying Israel’s foes (Jer 49:22). This is but one image of God’s love for his people. Jesus here applies this divine role and image to himself.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Alonzo Gaskill, [Odd Are, You’re Going to be Exalted](#), *Meridian Magazine*, June 25, 2008. See also: Bruce R. McConkie, “[The Probationary Test of Mortality](#),” address given at the University of Utah Institute of Religion, January 10, 1982.

⁵¹ Keener, p. 217.